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De-Islamizing Islam: Taliban Style

When I visited Afghanistan during the last days of communist Russia's political domination, I found Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, entirely intact, but today, under the so-called Islamic regime of the Taliban, the greater part of Kabul has been destroyed. And now the people of Afghanistan are faced with such great hardship as they have never before faced in their entire history.

The Taliban hold Russian communism to be "*kufr*" while regarding themselves to be the representatives of Islam. How strange it is that "*kufr*" inflicted only minimal harm upon Afghanistan, while "Islam" has almost totally ruined the country – to such an extent that people are compelled to flee from their own homeland. Sadly, all this is being done in the name of Islam. Judging from the result, one can say that this is nothing more or less than the deislamization of Islam.

Added to the long horrible list of depredations carried out in the name of the Afghan version of Islam, there is the extremely sad event of the demolitions which began on March 1, 2001. Following the order of their religious chief, the Taliban began blasting the statues of Gautam Buddha with dynamite and attacking them with bulldozers. They said that they were doing this in accordance with the teachings of Islam, for Islam did not permit idolatry.

This is a totally non-Islamic act. It is true that Islam is against idolatry, but there is certainly a clear difference between weaning people away from idol-worship and the destruction of idols. There are verses in the Quran which state: "Do not worship idols." But there is no verse in the Quran which says: "Destroy idols." The way of Islam is to purify the heart of idolatry: it is not to destroy statues made of stone.

Let us look at the history of Afghanistan in this connection. According to early tradition, Islam entered Afghanistan during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad himself. Later, the Prophet's close Companion, Khalid ibn Walid came here with other believers. At that time the majority of the population was Buddhist. Many of them converted to Islam. This process of the peaceful propagation of Islam continued and, by the end of the 10th century A.D., Islam had spread throughout Afghanistan.

It is worth noting here that the statues of Gautam Buddha had already been carved out of the mountainsides of Afghanistan 500 years before Islam's entry into the country during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Just as these statues were safe prior to the advent of Islam, they continued to remain safe throughout the fourteen hundred years of the Islamic era. It is only in recent times, during Taliban rule, that these statues have been held to be unIslamic and subjected to demolition.

Now the question arises as to whether the Taliban have a better knowledge of Islam than that of the Sahaba (the Prophet's companions), the Tabi'in (the Companion's disciples) and other great Islamic scholars of the past.

The truth is that while the Taliban are ostensibly smashing idols, what in reality they are doing is demolishing Islam. Far from serving the interests of Islam, this initiative is doing it the greatest harm.

Islam believes in the principle of tolerance between different religions. This verse was revealed in the Quran during the Makkan period: "For you your religion, for me mine." (109:6) If this Islamic principle was formulated, it could be worded like this: "Follow one and respect all."

We find many practical examples of adherence to this principle in Islamic history. For instance, during the period of Umar Faruq, the Second Caliph of Islam, Palestine was conquered. At that time an agreement was reached between the Caliph and the Christian authorities. One of the clauses of this agreement, signed by the Caliph Umar, was that the Christian churches as well as the statues of Mary and Christ placed in the churches and the Cross would remain as they were. This illustrates a principle of religious tolerance which has been observed by Muslims throughout the history of Islam. We do find instances of certain Muslim kings having broken idols. But these instances are exceptions and not the rule. Furthermore, such acts on the part of rulers were governed by their political interests and not by the teachings of Islam.

The statues of Gautam Buddha carved in the mountains may have been objects of worship in the past, but today they enjoy the position of historical monuments. They no longer belong to a particular religious group: their status is that of symbols of a historical heritage common to all mankind. The principle of Islam, applicable to this state of affairs, is to remove the issue from the private or the national sphere to the universal sphere.

One of the teachings of Islam is that Muslims ought not to take any such action as is likely to be counterproductive. For instance, the Quran enjoins:

"Revile not those whom they invoke besides Allah, lest they may revile Allah Spitefully without knowledge."

This shows that even if Muslims believe some act to be right, they may refrain from indulging in it, if the result is not going to be in their favour.

Looked at in the light of this principle, the present move of the Taliban is wholly against the teachings of Islam. For if such historical places and relics, which have profound and time-honoured associations for the believers of other religions, are destroyed in a Muslim country, those whose feelings are hurt would, as a result, feel justified, in starting to destroy places which are historically important to Muslims in their own respective countries. Such a move on the part of Muslims cannot but result in irretrievable losses to the Muslims themselves.

As soon as the Afghan government set about the task of demolishing the ancient statues, the seriousness of the matter was highlighted by the media on a world-wide basis. This prompt publicising of the event brought immediate condemnation for the Taliban's actions from all right-thinking people, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

Had the Afghan Taliban engaged in this destruction in the name of their nation or tribe, it, might conceivably have seemed acceptable within a very limited ethnic sphere. But they did not. They did it in the name of Islam and its Shariah, with the result that their actions began, *prima facie*, to be attributed to Islam. People began to express their disgust and indignation with Islam. They said that if this is Islam, it is nothing less than sheer barbarism, resulting from a medieval mindset which is totally unacceptable to the civilized society of today. Of course, the Taliban are ostensibly demolishing objects of idolatry, but when seen in the light of the result, they must stand charged with demolishing Islam itself.

It is unfortunate that, in spite of local and international protests, Afghanistan's Taliban government has decided to go ahead with the demolition of statues of historical and religious importance in the country. Historical monuments are the heritage of all mankind and do not belong to any government or area or people. Demolition of places of worship and statues of religious personalities is totally un-Islamic and unwarranted. Indeed, Islam orders us to respect the places of worship of other religions and certainly does not permit their destruction.

The Wisdom of Life

Machines, for instance clocks and watches generally run on a system of cog wheels. The movement of one such wheel sets another in motion. If either of the wheels does not mesh with the other, neither will the cog wheel move, nor will the machine be set in motion.

The same applies to human plans in the modern world. There are two “cog-wheels” here as well. And life’s system functions properly only when the two engage and work together in unison.

One wheel in this world is that of man, while the other is that of concomitant circumstances. Here, the individual can be effective only to the extent that external circumstances will permit. Given this state of affairs, wisdom lies in his knowing what is possible and what is not possible for him in terms of his circumstances.

Where interests are in conflict, the actual point at issue is not what should be the settlement from the point of view of justice; the actual solution to be sought in such a situation, is that which is possible in practical terms. That is why, in such instances, one should be willing to accept the possible, instead of engaging in futile hostilities over the issue of ideal justice. Such efforts will lead to nothing but further loss.

The same is the case with nations; Here, too, the leaders should look to what is achievable and what not in respect of actual circumstances. I have traveled to many parts of the globe and have tried to understand this matter in depth. To me, the degree of success achieved by the individual or the nation is in direct proportion to the effective interlocking of “ cog-wheel,” within a broad framework of non-adherence to rigid ideologies.

It was America’s good fortune that it found leaders throughout its history, who were free from the delusions of utopianism. They understood the laws of nature and started their national journey in accordance with these laws. By making steady progress for the last hundred years, America has come to be the foremost power in the world.

This principle of nature, in brief, favours healthy competition. The American leaders granted freedom to their citizens and opened up opportunities to achieve the desired success by proving their capability in a highly competitive field. These leaders limited the Government’s sphere to law and order, thus granting its citizen full freedom of action in other fields. As a result everyone found unhampered opportunities for the optimal development of personal potential.

The American leaders did not attempt to pour society into the mould of a fabricated ideology as the basis for national progress. Instead they looked only at what was naturally sustainable and adopted it.

On the contrary, in the Soviet Union certain theorists clinging to a contrived ideology attempted to re-structure the whole of society accordingly. When society refused to accept this, the rebels were killed in millions, as if they had no more significance than insects. This scheme of things was against nature and that is why, after a tumultuous struggle spanning over 75 years, it met with total failure.

The same was the case with India and Pakistan. Here too certain leaders devised certain ideologies of their own and wished to re-cast their entire countries in this mould. The attempt to implement this system by force was a total failure. And the precious period of fifty years of freedom was wasted callously.

The Indian and Pakistani leaders should have adopted the same principle as nature adopts with regard to water. When water flows from a mountain peak, it is left free to cascade down the hillsides, meander across the plains, spread out into lakes – in short, follow its own natural course until it reaches the sea.

India and Pakistan should have done the same. Having properly understood actual conditions and circumstances, they should have left society to proceed unhindered on the thoroughfare of nature. In this way an atmosphere of healthy competition would have been produced, and the capabilities of all their citizens would have played their role in the process of progress and development. But this was not to be. Ideological fanaticism produced the logic of coercion, which vitiated everything which came within its orbit.

The right way to proceed in this world is to allow things to take their natural course without placing any obstacles in their path. If any wielder of power conceives of a plan which in his view is superior (whatever its actual merits may be), he should work towards its implementation along peaceful lines, remaining strictly within the sphere of persuasion. He should wait also for the appropriate moment when people's thinking has changed, so that his plan may be carried into effect, in consonance with the law of nature itself. In that way, its outcome will be beneficial to all.

The actual point worth considering in the building of the social system is not some ideological scheme of things formulated by any particular leader, but what is humanly achievable from the practical standpoint. The part played by any given leader in the overhaul of the social system and, moreover in its subsequent consolidation, is only fifty per cent. The remaining fifty per cent is attributable to external circumstances. If a leader, failing to grasp this reality, is under the misapprehension that the entire country is his personal fiefdom, it would be the gravest blunder on his part to force upon the people his personal ideology. This would be verging on madness, for whatever he then did as a result of his misunderstanding should culminate not in construction but the very opposite.

It is good to be an idealist, but it has to be conceded that the attainment of the ideal in social life is seldom within the realms of the possible. The secret of success in restructuring society is for leaders and followers alike to aim at elevated goals. While taking care to subordinate personal idealism to overarching practicalities.

Peace is the name of God

In every religion including Islam, God is described as a Being Who is the source of peace. In the Quran we find a number of names for God which are descriptive of the divine attributes. One of these is *As Salam* (59:23), meaning Peace.

This name for God which specifically denotes peace occurs only once in the Quran. But there are many other names which indirectly connote peace. For instance, the word *Rahim* (Most Merciful) has occurred in the Qur'an more than two hundred times. Similarly, the word '*Rahman*' (Most compassionate) occurs not less than two hundred times.

As represented in the Qur'an, God is All Peace. He is peace in His very being and He desires that His servants live peacefully in this world. They should have peace in their hearts and extend that feeling to everyone. That is why one of the teachings of Islam is that when the Muslims meet one another, they should greet each other by saying "*Assalamu-Alaikum*," May peace be upon you.

One notable incident in the early history of Islam is very relevant to this topic. In 2 AH the battle of the Badr took place between the Prophet of Islam and his opponents. As we learn from traditions, the Prophet of Islam was seated at that time under a tent on a small hillock at the edge of the battlefield. At that moment an angel visited the Prophet and said: 'O Muhammad, God has sent you *Salam* (peace).' On hearing this, the Prophet expressed himself thus: 'God is Peace, Peace is from Him and Peace is to Him.' (Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, Vol. 3, p. 267).

This incident shows how great is the importance attached to peace in Islam. Even at a time of war hysteria, the message of God brought by the angel was one of peace. Moreover, the words uttered in response by the Prophet at such a delicate moment were those of peace.

Besides the Qur'an, the books of Hadith contain many saying which tell us of the importance of peace in Islam. For instance, the Prophet of Islam said, 'Peace is from Islam'. On another occasion, the Prophet of Islam observed, 'God is peace'. We also learn from traditions that the wording of the conclusion of the Prophet's prayer included the eulogy: 'O God, You are Peace and Peace is from You.'

A tradition in Sahih al Bukhari is related by a companion, Ammar ibn Yasir, "There are three actions, the performance of which is equal to possessing the whole faith. These are doing justice, doing one's utmost for the peace and well-being of the world, and spending on others in spite of a lack of means."

This part of the *hadith*, exhorting one to do utmost to bring about peace in the world, is extremely important. This shows the real Islamic spirit – a kind of special awareness that Islam wants to inculcate in human beings, which would predispose everyone to live in peace himself, to be anxious for the peace of all the people living in this world, and to do his very best to bring peace to the world.

The truth is that the maintenance of peace is the most important of God's laws. It is on the basis of this law that the entire universe is able to function. If its various elements did not follow this law, the whole universe – its systems thrown into disarray – would simply collapse.

The greatest success of the human being in this world lies in his intellectual development, in his spiritual advancement, in the production of the divine soul – the ultimate goal of man. And the struggle towards this goal can be carried on only in an atmosphere pervaded by universal peace. Without peaceful conditions, it is impossible to achieve any worthwhile goal.

The many communities living in different parts of the world are dissimilar in a variety of ways. But in one characteristic way they are alike: They all want to set out on the journey of progress. But this can be undertaken only in peaceful circumstances. It is vital, therefore, to give the topmost priority in the establishment of peace at the international level.

The Man Islam Builds

The man Islam aims to build is one in whom a two-fold activity is set in motion at the same time, one form of activity being internal and the other external. The result of this twin activity is that the spiritual side of his nature develops in parallel with his intellectual advancement, both processes going on unhampered. On the one hand there is a strengthening of the moral fibre by which his personality assumes its permanent shape, and on the other, there is a broadening of his intellectual horizons.

Internal Development

How does the Islamic way of life set off inner activities in man? In this, the mainspring is the concept of accountability. Islam brings man to the realization that God Almighty is omnipresent and omniscient so that he has the feeling that for all his words and deeds – even intentions, he is accountable before Him. And after death he will have to face the divine court of justice, where the whole record of his life will be examined. And then, according to its verdict, he will be sent either to eternal hell or eternal Heaven. This feeling surging within him is so powerful that it shakes the entire human personality. A *hadith* thus admonishes the individual: Reckon yourself before being reckoned with. Weigh yourself before being weighed. And prepare yourself for the Great Appearance on Doomsday (*Al-Tirmidhi*).

The consciousness of the presence of God activates all of the brain cells of the individual. A hunter once remarked: If you are walking through a jungle, and all of a sudden you notice a live tiger standing in a nearby glade, your blood stream will turn into a blood storm.

This is what happens when we stand in the presence of a tiger. At every moment Islam brings man to the realization not only of the Creator of the lion, but also of the Creator of the entire universe. One can judge when the thought of the presence of a tiger turns man's blood stream into a blood storm, how great a storm the thought of the presence of the Creator of the lion, that is, God Almighty, will be produced within a believer.

Therefore, by his own inner compulsion, the believer becomes a man of character and a staunch believer. For him it becomes impossible to be immoral or unjust or dishonest in his conduct to his fellow men.

This concept of the presence of God is no negative matter. This is a wholly positive reality. This is because God is not simply a source of power. He is also a source of mercy. The storm brought about by the awareness of the presence of God awakens not only the feeling of fear, but a strong feeling of hope as well. Similarly, the feeling of the presence of God becomes a perpetual incentive for the positive development of the human personality. This, in Islamic terms, is called a spiritual revolution. In short,

belief in Islam makes accountability to God man's greatest permanent concern. The potential of spirituality latent within man is activated by his belief to the ultimate extent; this turns him into a spiritual superman. But the feeling of the presence of God Almighty also cuts man down to size. 'And man cut to size' is the ultimate phrase in the spiritual dictionary. Such a man succeeds to the utmost degree in finding all those things that he ought to experience at the spiritual level. He becomes a man of God through and through.

External Activities

The Islamic man is one who, in consonance with his spiritual development, experiences constant intellectual activity which results in the most intense brain storming. The intellectual awakening or intellectual development of an Islamic man is so extensive that he becomes cerebrally activated to the highest possible extent. What is that external factor which stimulates this kind of intellectual activity in the Islamic man? It is *da'wah* work.

According to the Qur'an, Prophet of Islam is the final Prophet. Although no Prophet is going to come after him, the mission of the Prophet must continue. The Ummah of the Prophet, charged with carrying on this mission for posterity, is thus addressed in the Qur'an: And thus We made you an intermediary nation so that you might bear witness against the people and the Prophet might testify against you. (2:143)

A commentator of the Qur'an has interpreted this as follows: Muslims are intermediary between the Prophet and the nations of the world (*Al-Tabari*). In conformance with this, *da'wah* work is obligatory for the Muslim Ummah. It is their essential duty to receive the divine message of the Prophet and convey it to the rest of humanity. It is not simply an act of annunciation. It is the most important struggle. Because of this the Qur'an says: Do with them the great *jihad* by the help of the Qur'an. (25:52)

The Qur'an is a book, not a weapon. "Great *jihad* with the Qur'an" means a great religious endeavour; *da'wah* work is thus a great ideological struggle. It is a supreme intellectual effort which stretches to the utmost the mental capacity of the human being.

Intellectual Development

Da'wah is a strictly non-political mission. But it is an extremely difficult task to perform, because it invites challenges from virtually all sections of society. The *da'i* says: "Here is the truth with a capital T, and success in this world as well as in the world hereafter depends on the acceptance of this truth, so man has no choice but to accept *it*." This kind of claim is highly provocative, eliciting, reactions from every ideological group – religious, materialist, secular, atheist, etc.

The man with a mission throws down a challenge which provokes a response. A challenge-response-mechanism becomes operative which simulates continuous interaction, involving questions and answers,

discussions and dialogues. It is during this interaction that the process of intellectual development begins.

As a mission, *da'wah* work by its very nature is divine. Because of this, people with a mission are bound by their code of ethics to respond in a positive manner to their audiences regardless of the latter's misconduct. At all costs, they must, as a matter of principle, avoid all friction. As the Qur'an says: "Certainly, we (the Prophets) would bear with patience your persecution of *us*. (14:12)

This positive behaviour on the part of people engaged in the *da'wah* mission prevents them from succumbing to hatred for and violence against the other party. That again ensures that their intellectual growth and development will go on uninterruptedly. No situation whatsoever will halt this process of peaceful *da'wah* and, subsequently, the inner progress of those involved in it will continue ceaselessly.

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, once said: "Beware of the wisdom of *mu'min* (a believer), because he sees with the light of God." How is it that a *mu'min* becomes a man of wisdom, in such a superior sense? It is because his faith makes him pious and God-fearing. In his state of piety, he undergoes the inner experience which psychologists call brainstorming. This helps activate his potential to the full extent. The result is miraculous: if, before, he was a man, now after this brainstorming, he becomes a superman.

Then comes *da'wah*, that is, the call to Islam. According to the Qur'an, *da'wah* is the great *jihad*. Why is *da'wah* the great *jihad*, or great struggle? Because it is a universal mission. It is a most serious task. It engages one's entire capacities throughout one's whole life. Every time one is faced with intellectual challenges, one is bound to give a strong response.

Thus, *da'wah* becomes an extensive course of action through which one's personality develops day by day, until one reaches the highest level of intellectual and spiritual development.

Iman (faith) and *da'wah* are two basic levels of Islam. If *iman* is a superior ideology, *da'wah* is a superior course of action. *Iman* purifies one's mind and soul, while *da'wah* imbues one's personality with a sublime probity. One who adopts Islam as a universal mission, in both the ideological and practical sense, is morally activated to the maximum possible extent and this course, slowly but surely, leads him to reach the highest pinnacle of humanity.

Stating the relationship between man and true religion the Qur'an says:

So you set your face towards the true faith uprightly, the upright nature with which God has endowed man, and let there be no alteration in God's Creation. That is the right religion, although most men may not know it. (30:30)

This means that every human being is created by God to be capable – as a matter of his natural constitution – of accepting the religion of truth. The Unity God is a truth, arrived at intuitively, and is plain to every man of common sense, unless he perverts himself by the different prejudices which he

receives from his environment. Islam is thus the natural religion that a child left to itself would develop. A western writer, Lady Cobbold, has rightly described it:

Islam is the religion of common sense.

When this potential is realized, it results in the emergence of a new man. What kind of character is possessed by this new man is made clear by the following *hadith*:

Nine things the Lord has commanded me:

Fear of God in private and in public;

Justness, whether in anger or in calmness;

Moderation in both poverty and affluence;

Joining hands with those who break away from me;

and giving to those who deprive me;

and forgiving those who wrong me;

and making of my silence meditation;

and my words remembrance of God;

and taking a lesson from my observation.

(Razin)

This *hadith* gives a complete picture of the man Islam wants to build.

The Islamic Way of Life

The Islamic way of life, in a word, is a God-oriented life. The greatest concern of a Muslim is God Almighty. The focus of his whole life is *Akhirah*, that is, the ideal world of God. He always obeys divine injunctions in every aspect of life. His life becomes a practical expression of the Qur'anic verse:

Take on God's own dye. And who has a better dye than God's? And we are His worshippers.
(2:138)

'Taking on God's dye,' means being of a 'godly character' in all the personal, social and economic affairs of one's life. The following pages of the chapter are devoted to portraying various aspects of this 'godly' character as personified in a Muslim individual whose words and deeds in family matters, or with respect to earning one's livelihood and whose dealings with other members of society, always seem to be distinguishably 'dyed in the divine hue.'

Iman (Faith)

By accepting *iman* one enters the fold of Islam. But Iman is not simply a recitation of *kalima* (creed of Islam). According to the Qur'an, it is *ma'arifah* (5:83) that is, realization. Thus realization of truth is the door to Islam. When one discovers that Islam is truly God's religion and that it is the same truth one has been seeking all along, one undergoes a unique experience of realization which is known in Islamic terminology as *ma'arifah*.

Making any kind of discovery revolutionizes a person's life but when this discovery is of the truth with a capital T, this intellectual revolution becomes synonymous with the emergence of a new life in the individual.

This kind of intellectual revolution is no simple event: it turns a man into a superman, and gives him the greatest mission of his life. It regulates his life in such a way that no part of it remains unaffected. He begins to See all of humanity as his family and the entire universe as his abode. Such a discoverer becomes a maker of history rather than a product of history.

This is the stuff of *iman*. And it was this *iman* which enabled the Prophet and his companions to produce, as one historian remarked, "the most miraculous of all miracles."

Ibadah (worship)

Obadiah or worship is not simply the observation of a set of rituals. It is more a profound kind of religious experience. In fact, it is the physical and spiritual expression of the human personality on a higher plane of consciousness.

Addressing man, the Qur'an says, "Prostrate yourself in adoration and bring yourself closer (to God)" (96:19). The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was once asked 'What is the essence of *ibadah*? He replied: "The worship of God as though you are seeing Him. Or if you are not seeing Him, He is seeing you."

There are two kinds of *ibadah*, or worship, in Islam, the first kind of *ibadah* have been prescribed at specified *times* – *salat*, *sawm*, *zakat*, *hajj*, (prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage). These forms of devotion are called the pillars of Islam. Then there are unspecified forms of *ibadah*, which consists of *dhikr* and *fikr* (3:191), meaning to remember God with feelings of fear and love.

This second form of *ibadah* aims at mental activation of the human soul so that he may be enabled to see God's signs in everything he comes across in his daily life. This is the *ibadah* or worship, which is obligatory for every Muslim throughout his life.

Akhlaq (morality)

What is morality? It is to live among one's fellow men according to the moral teachings of Islam. The essence of Islamic morality is thus set forth in a *hadith*: "Behave with others as you would like them to behave towards you." (al-Bukhari) By nature everyone knows of what sort of conduct he approves and of what sort he disapproves. So to follow this generally accepted moral criterion in relation to others is essentially Islamic morality.

Islam differentiates between social manners and social character. Social manners are based on the principle 'Do as they do.' But Islamic morality is based on the formula of unilateral and unconditional positive conduct. 'Do good to others, even if they are not doing good to you.' (al-Tabarani)

The Qur'an portrays Muslims as individuals who "repel evil with good." (28:54)

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, advised a Muslim to "do good to those who harm you" (al-Tirmirdhi). The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was the true embodiment of the finest moral character. Addressing the Prophet, the Qur'an declares: "Surely you have a sublime character." (68:4)

So great an importance has been attached in Islam to moral character that it has been set up as a criterion by which to judge all other Islamic virtues. If one is good in relation to other human beings that will serve as evidence that one also is good in relation to God.

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, puts it thus:

"One who is not grateful to man cannot be grateful to God either." (Al-Bayhaqi)

Social Relations

A. Individual Responsibility

To preserve society from instability and keep it in a perpetually reformed state, Islam has given a basic

commandment, which has been mentioned at many places in the Qur'an. One such Qur'anic verse runs: "(Believers are those) who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil" (9:112). The same point has also been repeatedly made in a number of traditions such as the following: "A believer ought to open the gate of good and close the door of evil" (*Musnad Ahmad*).

This commandment has been misrepresented by certain self-styled advocates of Islamic revolution as being political in nature. But this is not so. It is entirely non-political. It only indicates that every member of society should have a strong sense of his responsibility towards society. No one should remain indifferent on seeing the perpetration of evil or injustice. He should feel the pain of others in his own heart. He should rise in support of the rights of the oppressed. When one sees someone engaged in the calumny and slander of others, he should attempt to stop him from doing so. He should make the iniquity known to other people, so that the culprit may be compelled by means of public pressure to desist from indulging in such evil acts.

Every member of society should consider the upholding of virtue to be an essential duty. The greatest concern of every individual should be to see that goodness flourishes in society and that evils are uprooted from it. Before any evil takes roots, it should be nipped in the bud.

This task of enjoining good and forbidding evil has to be performed with the utmost gentleness and well wishing rather than with harshness and violence.

That is why this social responsibility has been linked with acts of worship in Islam. For instance, with reference to prayer, the Qur'an says: "Surely, prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil." (29:45)

B. Family Life

A sane society, from the Islamic point of view, is but an extension of a sane family. Even human society at large is nothing other than a single family gradually extended throughout history. That is why Islam has greatly emphasized the significance of family life being disciplined and well organized so that it may play its part in maintaining social stability.

A family begins when a male and a female decide as members of society to live together under one roof. However, Islam does not allow such a relation between a man and a woman, unless it is based on a legitimate marital contract which is basically meant to be a guarantee of a lifelong partnership of rights and duties, and not merely a temporary entertainment. Hence, there is no room in Islam for what is known, as pre-marital or extra-marital affairs between the two sexes. And this is one of the reasons that we do not find in Islamic society broken homes, illegitimate children, neglected or abandoned parents, etc. – phenomena that are prevalent in secular societies.

Through the institution of marriage, Islam aims at building a society free from anarchy, instability, indecency, violence and crime, especially in relation to youngsters. Marriage, when conducted and

maintained on the lines laid down in the Qur'an and Sunnah, provides an organized unit in the form of a 'home.' In that way, the succeeding generations are brought up and nurtured physically, morally and mentally in a healthy atmosphere and under the supervision of loving and concerned parents. This training at home helps the children enter society equipped with a deep sense of responsibility, respect for human values and other qualities, such as sincerity, which are essential for the better construction and development of any social system. A society composed of such homes or training units will never suffer from the chaos and destructive instabilities from which modern societies are suffering nowadays.

Guidelines for a healthy, happy and meaningful marital life, along with the rights and duties of parents and other members of the family, occupy a considerable space in both the Qur'an and *Hadith*. A few references in this regard are given below:

1. "Men should approach women with the sincere intention of entering into wedlock with them, not committing fornication." (4:24).
2. "And your Lord had commanded you to serve none but Him, and to show goodness to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, show them no sign of impatience and do not rebuke them, but speak to them a generous word. Treat them gently and with compassion, and say: "O my Lord! Have mercy on them as they brought me up when I was little.'" (17:23-24)
3. "No parents have ever given to their children any gift better than a good moral education." (*Al-Adab al-Mufrad*)
4. "My Lord has enjoined me to do nine things," the Prophet once said, and one of them, he stressed was "keeping on good terms even with those relatives who cut off ties of kinship." (al-Hakim)

C. Legitimate Livelihood

So many social evils can be directly attributed to either some members of society having an insufficient means of livelihood or others having an excess of wealth. Islam urges that one earns one's livelihood by all possible but lawful means, so that one's essential needs are properly met on the one hand, and one does not remain dependent on others, on the other. According to the Qur'an and *Hadith*, the greed for more and more, niggardliness, holding money back to centralize it in one or a few hands, are the main roots of all criminal and destructive tendencies in human society. That is why virtues such as contentment, moderation, simplicity, altruism, spending on charity and sharing one's happiness with others are, so highly and repeatedly recommended in Islam.

Conversely, vices like extravagance, selfishness, monopolistic practices, exploitation, usury and all unfair means of money-making are strongly condemned and prohibited. How to deal with the problems of earning a livelihood in accordance with the Islamic way of life? The answer to this question may be summed up in the following points:

- (a) Avoidance of transgression. God Almighty has declared in the Qur'an: "Eat of the good things we have given for your sustenance, and do not transgress with respect to them." (20:81)

- (b) Self-reliance. One should try one's utmost to earn one's daily bread by one's own efforts, without being dependent on anybody else. The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, is reported to have said repeatedly: "The best food one has ever had is that which one has earned with one's own hands." (Abu Dawud)
- (c) Avoidance of niggardliness and spending in charity. When one is fortunate enough to earn even more than it takes to meet one's own needs, one should not try to be parsimonious with one's earnings. Instead, one should rather extend a supporting hand to less fortunate or even destitute members of society. Otherwise, one's wealth will become a curse for oneself rather than a blessing. Hence, the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, used to say in his regular prayers: "O Allah, give a good compensation to one who spends in charity and cause destruction to one who holds his wealth back." (Nasai)
- (d) Contentment. To attain inner peace and real happiness, one has to remain content with what one has been able to earn independently and lawfully. The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, says in this respect: "Indeed, he has attained eternal success and prosperity who accepted Islam and God has filled his heart with contentment towards whatever he was given." He also said: "A little that suffices is much better than a surfeit that causes disturbance." (Al-Bayhaqi)
- (e) Simplicity. Last, but not the least, an important Islamic principle concerning one's livelihood is simplicity. The Prophet's own life style was a unique example of simplicity. In one of his sayings he has even considered it one of the signs of true faith (Ibn Majah). In another *hadith*, he warns his companions: "Stay away from the luxurious life. For the servants of God do not indulge in luxury." (*Musnad Ahmad*)

Islam As It Is

Islam is a religion of peace in the fullest sense of the word. The Qur'an calls its way 'the paths of peace' (5:16). It describes reconciliation as the best policy (4:128), and states that God abhors any disturbance of the peace (2:205).

The root word of Islam is '*sil'm*', which means peace. So the spirit of Islam is the spirit of peace. The first verse of the Qur'an breathes the spirit of peace. It reads:

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most compassionate.

This verse is repeated in the Qur'an no less than 114 times. It shows the great importance Islam attaches to such values as mercy and compassion. One of God's names, according to the Qur'an, is *as-salam*, which means peace. Moreover the Qur'an states that the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was sent to the world as a mercy to mankind. (21: 107)

A perusal of the Qur'an shows that most verses of the Qur'an (and also the *Hadith*) are based on peace and kindness, either directly or indirectly. The ideal society, according to the Qur'an is *Dar as-Salam*, that is, the house of peace (10:25).

The Qur'an presents the universe as a model which is characterized by harmony and peace (36:40). When God created heaven and earth, He so ordered things that each part might perform its function peacefully without clashing with any other part. The Qur'an tells us that "the sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each in its own orbit runs." (36:40)

For billions of years, therefore, the entire universe has been fulfilling its function in total harmony with His divine plan.

These are only but a few references to show what great importance Islam attaches to peace. In fact, Islam cannot afford not to be in a state of peace because all that Islam aims at – spiritual progress, intellectual development, character building, social reform, educational activities, and above all *da'wah* – can be achieved only in an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

According to Islam, peace is not simply an absence of war. Peace opens doors to all kinds of opportunities which are present in any given situation. It is only in a peaceful situation that planned activities are possible. It is for this reason that the Qur'an says 'reconciliation is the best' (4:128). Similarly the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, has observed: "God grants to gentleness (*rifq*) what he does not grant to violence (*unf*). (*Sunan Abu Dawud* 4/255)

Some people bracket justice with peace, but Islam does not subscribe to this notion. Islam believes in peace for the sake of peace. According to Islam, justice is not the direct result of peace. Peace only

provides a framework within which we may work towards justice. There are so many examples in the life of the Prophet which prove that the Prophet never bracketed justice with peace.

He always took peaceful circumstances as an opportunity to work for justice and did not attempt to derive justice directly from peace. One such clear example is provided by the treaty of Hudaibiyya, between the Prophet and his opponents. From the details of the peace treaty it is clear that no clause regarding justice was included. Obviously the conditions of this treaty was quite against justice. But the Prophet accepted this treaty, not because it was giving them justice, but because it was *paving the way to work for justice*.

Because of the importance of peace, the Qur'an has clearly declared that no aggressive war is permitted in Islam. Muslims can engage themselves only in a defensive, not in an offensive war, irrespective of the circumstances. (2:190)

According to Islam, peace is the rule and war is only an exception. Even in defensive war, we have to see the result. If the result is doubtful, Muslims should avoid war, even in a defensive situation. Stray acts of aggression are not enough for Muslims to rush into war. They have to assess the whole situation and adopt a policy of avoidance when war is not certain to achieve a positive result.

There are several examples of this kind in the early period of Islam. In Islamic history, one such example is that of the battle of the trench. In this event there was clear-cut aggression on the part of the antagonists, who traveled as far as 300 miles from Makkah to Madinah only to attack the Muslims. But the Prophet dug a trench in order to prevent an armed confrontation and thus avoided engaging in a defensive war.

It is true that *jihad* is one of the most important teachings of Islam. But *jihad* is not synonymous with war. In Islam another word is used for war and fighting. This word is *qital*. When the Qur'an refers to war or fighting, it uses the word *qital* and not *jihad*.

Jihad literally means to strive or to struggle. So *jihad* actually means peaceful struggle, especially for *da'wah* work. The Qur'an says: Do great *jihad* with the help of the Qur'an. (25:52)

The Qur'an is simply a book, and not a sword, "so do great jihad with the Qur'an" means, do great *jihad* with the ideological power of the Qur'an. In fact, *jihad* is only another name for peaceful activism. And peaceful activism is the only weapon by which Islam wants to achieve all its aims and objectives.

The Qur'an has this to say of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, We have not sent you forth but as a mercy to mankind. (21:107)

In the Qur'an and the *Hadith*, there are many such references which go to prove that Islam is a religion of peace, love and human brotherhood. However, it is also a fact that in later times, the image of Islam has altered drastically. Now Islam has come to be regarded as a religion of violence rather than as a religion of peace. This transformation in the image of Islam has not simply been produced by the media.

The responsibility for this falls on latter-day Muslims, who have failed to maintain the original image of Islam.

In actual fact, the mission of all the prophets right from Adam to Christ was one and the same – of establishing the ideology of monotheism in the world, so that man might worship one God alone. As we know, there came a large number of prophets in ancient times, but the message of monotheism remained at the initial stage; it could not culminate in revolution. This state continued till the time of Christ, the last but one Prophet. The reason being that in ancient times, the system of monarchy was entrenched throughout the world. The kings, in order to secure their political interests, adopted the course of religious persecution. These kings suppressed all religious movements, which were different from the state religion. They would nip all apostasy in the bud, since they saw religion as a matter of affirming one's loyalty to the state. If a person adhered to a religion other than the state religion, he was regarded as a rebel.

That is why in ancient times prophetic movements could go no further ahead than the stage of *da'wah*. No sooner would a movement based on monotheism arise than the coercive political system would be activated to pull it out by its roots. The reason for the absence of any historical record of prophets (besides the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him,) in antiquity is traceable to the intense opposition of these coercive political systems. All the prophets of ancient times, historically speaking, were like mythical beings, rather than real human beings accepted as historical figures. The Prophet Jesus was the last link in the chain of these persecutions faced by the preachers of monotheism. Then God decreed the abolition of this coercive political system, even if it entailed the use of force in order that the age of religious persecution might be brought to an end forever, and replaced by the age of religious freedom. This divine plan was brought to completion through the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, and his companions. This is the command given in the Qur'an:

Fight them until there be no persecution and religion be wholly Allah's (8:39).

Therefore the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, received special divine succour in the form of a powerful team consisting of one hundred thousand individuals. Equipped with this team the Prophet waged war to end this coercive system of religious persecution, and it was in Arabia that it was first of all overthrown. Then within a very short span of time, they advanced to abolish the coercive system established by the Sassanid and Byzantine empires. In the wake of this Islamic action, the coercive system was abolished forever in the major part of the inhabited world of the time. This war waged by the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, and his companions was not a war as is commonly understood, but rather a divine operation, which was carried out by a people who possessed a high standard of moral character.

However, this operation was certainly only temporary in nature. Its goal was to put an end to the age of religious persecution and usher in the age of religious freedom. This end was fully achieved during the early period of Islam, the age of the pious Caliphs. Afterwards the time came to keep the sword in its sheath and engage in *da'wah* work, that is, the call to God, which was the real and permanent goal of

Islam. According to the explicit command of the Qur'an, the call to God is the true and eternal mission of Islam, whereas war is only temporary and allowed only in exceptional cases.

Here it would be pertinent to refer to a great companion of the Prophet. After the period of the pious 'Caliphate, a group of Muslims once again engaged in war. At that time some senior Companions were present in Makkah and Madinah. But they did not join these wars, one prominent name being that of Abdullah ibn Umar ibn Khattab. He did not approve of these wars; therefore he remained away from them. Some of those involved in these wars came to him and said: God has commanded us in the Qur'an to fight against *fitna* (persecution). Then why do you not join with us in these wars? Abdullah ibn Umar replied that "the command of the Qur'an to fight against *fitna* is not what you hold to be *fitna*. *Fitna* meant religious persecution and we have already fought and put an end to this *fitna* (*qad fa'alna*). Therefore now after the removal of this obstacle, we have to engage ourselves in peaceful *da'wah* work, rather than initiating hostilities and creating new *fitna* once again, which is akin to creating new obstacles for peaceful Islamic *da'wah* (al-Bukhari, Sahih, *Kitab at-Tafsir*, under *al-Baqarah* and *al-Anfal*).

Umar ibn Abdullah had made an extremely pertinent point at the most appropriate time, but this point of view was not forcefully taken up by others. Afterwards when the Islamic sciences were developed, this important point made by Abdullah ibn Umar could not be highlighted, with the result that history took the course of wars and conquests, while in terms of the real teachings of Islam, history should have taken the course of *da'wah* and the propagation of Islam.

It is no exaggeration to say that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other. The concept of Islamic violence is so obviously unfounded that, *prima facie* it stands rejected. The fact that violence is not sustainable in the present world is enough to convince one that violence as a principle is quite alien to the scheme of things in Islam. Islam claims to be an eternal religion and such a religion cannot afford a principle in its scheme which will not be sustainable in later periods of human history. An attempt to bracket violence with Islam amounts to casting doubts upon the very eternity of the Islamic religion.

No wonder, then, that the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, so earnestly used to entreat his Lord in his daily prayer: "O God, you are the original source of Peace; from You is all Peace, and to You returns all Peace. So, make us live with Peace; and let us enter paradise: the House of Peace. Blessed be You, our Lord, to whom belongs all Majesty and Honour!"

The cure for anger is silence

Abdullah ibn Abbas records the Prophet as saying: "When anyone of you becomes angry, he should remain silent." This the Prophet repeated three times.

(Ahmad, *Musnad*)